



The Comfort Zone

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Introduction

For my bachelor's thesis I chose to study my own creative process through the lens of the comfort zone. I chose this topic as a way to better understand my own identity as a designer, something I often question.

My thesis consists of two parts: a production phase and a written paper. The written portion will act as a documentation of my production. For my production I plan to follow a fairly traditional formula for printmaking. This includes sketching, mark making and finally handmade or digital refining of sketches to repeats and prints.

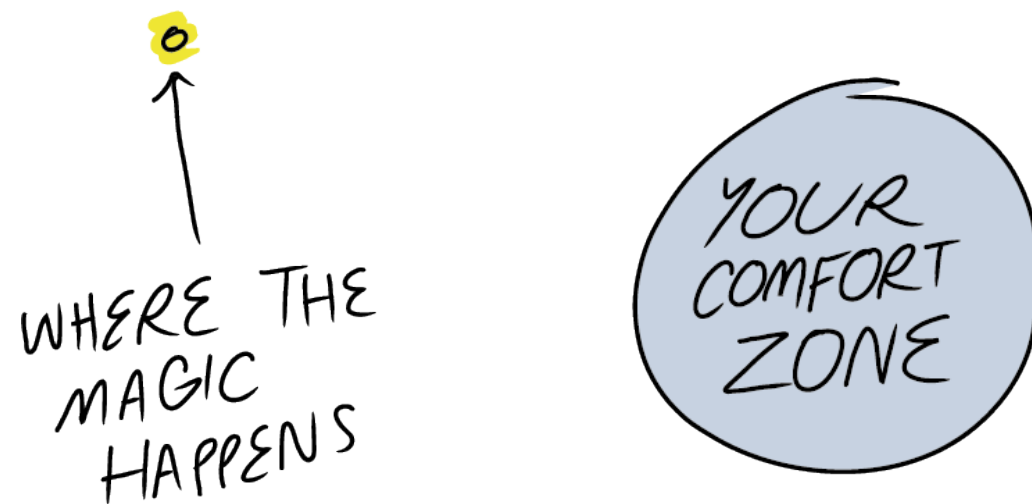
My goal for my thesis is to better understand my identity as a designer by studying my own creative process. I want to define what it means for me to stay in or leave my comfort zone, as well as what methods work best for me.

Throughout my studies I have felt varying levels of anxiety or certainty when it comes to the quality of my work and my character as a designer. I have not focused on one material or one element of design. This has lead me to become a "jack of all trades, master of none." I can apply my skills to a range of different tasks, which is positive. However, because I have not focused all of my attention onto one medium, I sometimes feel less confident in my abilities.

Because of this anxiety, I felt like it would be beneficial to take this opportunity to focus on my own creative process.



The Comfort Zone



This is the illustration that first made me want to write about the comfort zone. You've probably seen it before, as it has been in circulation on social media and amongst pseudo motivational speakers for years.

The reason this illustration piqued my interest is because I find it a little pretentious, however well-intentioned the meaning. The oversimplification of complex behaviour has always irked me and I can almost feel the self-satisfaction radiating off of it.

Initially, I was going to focus on disproving the idea it represents: that nothing really worthwhile is done whilst in the comfort zone. That is until I realized what actually interested me was the truth in it. That is not

to say that I agree with or endorse this way of thinking. I do not believe that in order to do anything "magical" one must always be outside of one's comfort zone, never allowing oneself to rest or reflect. I find this mindset to be increasingly prevalent in our culture that values result over experience.

There seems to be a cultural attitude against the comfort zone. One that promotes "mastering your life."

"Are you really happy or just comfortable?"

"If we're growing, we're always going to be out of our comfort zone."

"Your comfort zone is your danger zone."

"Step so far outside your comfort zone that you forget how to get back."

These are a few quotes you can find when you search for "the comfort zone" online. What all of these quotes have in common is that they each have a kind of reckless abandon in regards to reality. Of course how you interpret a quote is up to your own personal perspective. That being said, being preached to in this manner doesn't inspire so much as it irritates. "It is impossible to escape the gurus and influencers on social media who preach that choosing safety is self-sabotage," writes Melody Wilding in her article *Please Stop Telling Me to Leave My Comfort Zone*. (2018).

My thesis proposes that instead of leaving our comfort zones entirely, we should learn to understand our boundaries and work on expanding them. In all honesty, I chose to study this topic because I felt I needed to expand the boundaries of my own comfort zone.

There is no clear origin of the term "comfort zone," but no doubt the concept has been around nearly as long as humans have.

In Alisdair White's publication *From Comfort Zone to Performance Management*, White defines the comfort zone as "a behavioural state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviours to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk." (2008, p. 5)

This definition is useful, but it is important to remember that in this context the comfort zone is defined only in relation to business management, and the concept extends far beyond that.

All humans have a comfort zone, each one unique. If I were to define the comfort zone, I would say that the comfort zone is a place either in our minds or in our environments that we create to keep ourselves protected and efficient. Not only do our comfort zones feel nice to stay in, we must also remember that our actions in our comfort zones are almost automatic, freeing us from having to think about each and every choice we make, allowing us to focus on other things. The comfort zone is made of habits, routines and expectations.

What I have noticed both in my life and in this project is that when I change a habit or try something new, I don't feel like I'm stepping out of my comfort zone into the abyss. Rather, I feel like I am establishing a brand new comfort zone. I have also noticed that I don't have just one comfort zone, I have dozens. Each situation requires me to act differently. There is a comfort zone for being at home, one for pattern design, one for being at work, one for being on public transport. The list goes on.

It may take some experimentation to figure out how to make each new comfort zone work, but I, like countless people before me, have learnt to adapt. It is human nature to experience the discomfort of change and it is also human nature to learn to become comfortable with it.

This brings me back to the illustration. I think that what really bothers me about it is that it completely ignores how valuable our comfort zones are to us. They should not be discarded or viewed as barriers to developing character. Instead they should be tended to and allowed to grow, enriching our experiences and hopefully making our lives a little bit easier.

1

The Blank Page

For me, getting started is the hardest part of any project. It takes up a large portion of time, and the act of beginning something is in itself out of my comfort zone.

In this chapter I'll cover the topics related to getting started, including procrastination, inspiration and motivation and how it all comes back to the comfort zone.

1.1

Procrastination

The first step of any project for me is to *not* start the project. I procrastinate. Over the years I have found many ways to do it. I clean my apartment from top to bottom, I go out, I waste hours and hours doing nothing of importance. Sometimes I do relatively productive things so I don't feel completely useless. I'll organize my workstation, getting everything ready to start work. I will do anything but begin, anything to take my mind off of the daunting task ahead of me.

Some call it “self-sabotage.” Procrastination is something most of us are familiar with. “We can't sleep- but we can't work.” Says Nic Voge, senior associate director of Princeton University's McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning. Voge posits that procrastination is not the result of our laziness, but is actually a form of self-protection. “If we earn a bad result, it doesn't mean we're not talented, able or worthy; we were just too busy or distracted to do our best.” (Voge, 2017) It is the fear of failure that prevents us from beginning our work, because when we do begin we are faced with the fact that failure is a possibility.

Voge notes that those who procrastinate tend to do so when it comes to tasks they feel passionate about. We become “over-motivated” and tie our sense of self-worth to our performance. This is very much the case for me. I often forget that my worth as a person is not directly linked to my productivity. This is something I have also noticed amongst my peers, when the joy of learning is corrupted into an unspoken or unacknowledged competition between classmates. In their masters thesis *Sketchbook*, textile designer Reeta Ek writes “If the goal of work turns into elevating your rank or winning a reward that necessitates competition; what you end up getting is a neurotic person.” (Ek, 2015, p. 35)

The comfort zone and its role in the creative process is apparent here. For most people, who sincerely care about what they do, it is easier to put off facing the truth; that what is worth working for, is almost always harder than they think it is going to be. I know that this is true for me, and find myself procrastinating doing things that I enjoy simply because I am afraid that I won't be as good at it as I think I should be.



The Impostor Syndrome

The Impostor Syndrome, first identified in the 1978 paper *The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention* (Clance & Imes) refers to a phenomenon wherein a person's internal experience of their intellect and achievements lead them to believe that they have fooled others into overestimating their intelligence, and that in reality, they are undeserving of their honors and successes.

Clance and Imes refer to two groups within which "impostors" typically fall into. In group one are those who have been told, either directly or indirectly, that they are not perceived as "bright" and may instead be categorised as a social or "sensitive" type. These people tend to work hard for their achievements but are unable to forget past comments about their intelligence or capability (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 3). I fall into the second group. Those in the second group have been told throughout their adolescence

that they are intelligent and talented, only to begin doubting their abilities once they cannot actually perform perfectly with ease.

This was true for me, and I developed impostor syndrome shortly after entering university. I had previously been a big fish in a small pond, and coming to a place where everybody was hugely talented was both a source of great inspiration and great anxiety. I know I am not alone in this and have had conversations about the experience with many of my peers. The conversations typically follow the final critique of a course or a group exhibition, when everyone has their best work on display and is particularly vulnerable to comparison.

Despite this, the feelings of inadequacy pass, and I am able to recognize my achievements later on, while also recognizing that the talents of others does not diminish my own work.

"I have written 11 books, but each time I think, 'Uh-oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out.'"

-Maya Angelou

1.2

Motivation

Motivation is the force which drives all of our actions. Creative work is primarily brought about with one of two methods of motivation. One is extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is not rooted in ourselves; it comes from looming deadlines, the need to be perceived in a certain way or from fear of failure or punishment.

Intrinsic motivation is what drives us. It comes from wanting to do something rather than having to do it. The enjoyment of the action itself is what makes us do it. Intrinsic motivation is more elusive than extrinsic mo-

tivation. Dan Pink states in his TED-talk *The Puzzle of Motivation*, that intrinsic motivation is comprised of three elements: Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose. “Autonomy: the urge to direct our own lives. Mastery: the desire to get better and better at something that matters. Purpose: the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves.” (Pink, 2009, 00:12:18-00:12:59)

It is intrinsic motivation that feeds creative processes. In fact, some incentives have been proven to hinder creative thought. One example of this, provided by Pink is that of

Wikipedia and Encarta. Encarta was meant to be an all-encompassing encyclopedia, run by the Microsoft corporation. People were hired and incentivised with large paychecks. It ultimately died because it could not compete with Wikipedia, a free alternative run by volunteers (Pink, 2009, 00:16:01-00:16:43).

My own motivation comes from a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic sources. Of course, I am motivated by deadlines and grades, but the overall motivation for design comes intrinsically. I would not be studying it if I did not sincerely want to and if I didn't enjoy the process.

1.3

Inspiration

If motivation is the vehicle that drives creative work, inspiration is the gas that starts the car. Inspiration is the first moment wherein our environment goes from being just an environment to a resource. Ancient Greeks believed that inspiration came from the muses who bestowed divine creativity to humans.

For me, inspiration is when my brain makes the leap from perceiving to imagining. In some cases inspiration arrives before I even know what it is I want to do. In other cases, I need to go out and seek it. “Often, creative work begins with inspiration, but because a person doing this work for a paycheck can’t afford to wait for it, they can and should also learn how to seek it out” (Ek, 2015, p. 26).

Inspiration From the Comfort Zone

For this project I chose to gather inspiration in a different manner than I typically do. In choosing the Comfort Zone as my topic, I came to the decision to not actively seek out inspiration, but to instead allow it to appear to me organically.

In most cases, I will do research on one or two specific things and use that as a visual base for my project. In a past pattern design course I chose to take inspiration from B-horror movies from the 1970s and 80s and focused specifically on that.

For this project I knew that I wanted to focus on the comfort zone in creative processes. This proved to be a slight obstacle to my work, since there is no clear correlation between

such an abstract concept as “the comfort zone” and any patterns that I produce. I found myself unable to answer when people asked me, “what does pattern making have to do with the comfort zone?”

Ultimately, I realised that I did not need to find any visual resources from the comfort zone, and that my job was to analyze my creative process and glean how the comfort zone plays a role in it. I was then free to continue work, and chose to take a phenomenological route, letting inspiration reveal itself to me instead of seeking it out.



Phenomenological Inspiration

Experience and consciousness are the pillars of the philosophy of phenomenology. In Juhani Pallasmaa's book, *The Eyes of The Skin*, Pallasmaa focuses on ocularcentrism, the obsession with the visual that plagues modern architecture. Pallasmaa argues that architecture can and should be experienced with all of our senses. Sight, smell, touch, taste and sound are equal in relevance to how we experience, remember and imagine our lives. (Pallasmaa, 2005)

For this project I chose to avoid an ocular-centric approach. I wanted my work to be a reflection of the experience of the creative process. In seeking out visual sources that had nothing to do with the project, I feared I would be diluting the final product.

I allowed inspiration to reveal itself to me. Doing this freed my mind from overanalyzing my surroundings. I tried not to actively spend time piecing together inspiration. Although I do enjoy that step of the creative process, I tend to sometimes let the inspiration take over the project. I develop blinders to everything else, and I felt that for this project there was no need to restrict myself in this way. I was also interested to see how the patterns would come together as a collection when

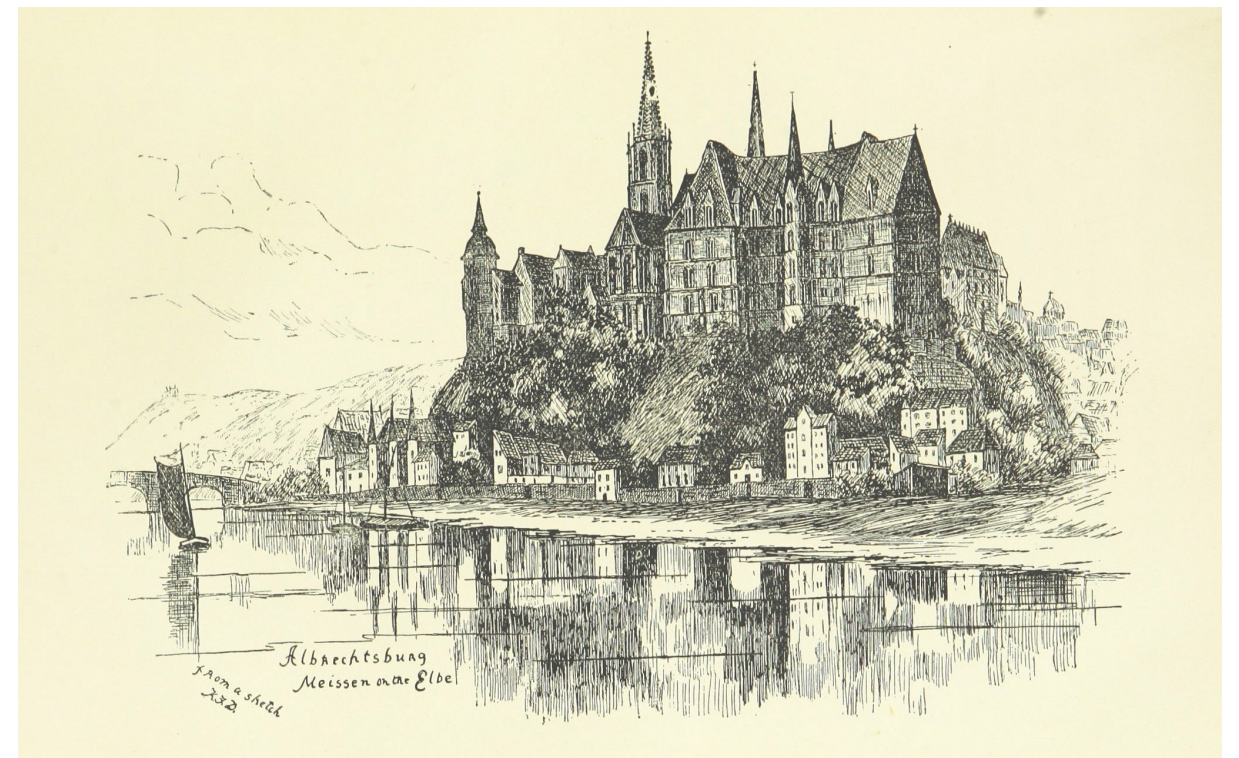
there was no initial springboard to jump off of.

I let my mind wander. I would look at my surroundings without locking on to certain visually interesting points. I would not attempt to imitate anything I saw directly. I let myself be free from constantly evaluating the aesthetic appeal of everything, and let my unconscious do the work.

This way of working felt very peaceful. Whilst sketching, I did what felt good and in the end I was happy with how cohesive everything looked. Later on, I did find more specific sources of inspiration, but only because I passively let them come to me. Half of my production was spent in Germany, where I was hugely inspired by my surroundings there. I also found inspiration in the architecture and became fascinated with baroque style wallpapers, which later on led me to chinoiserie wallpapers. Ultimately the phenomenological experience of my surroundings that inspired me the most. This isn't easy to pin down, I didn't analyze or measure my conscious experience. Smells, textures, sounds and smells all inspired my work, more so than anything visual.

"When I'm drawing it feels like I'm printing out a barcode for the exact moment I'm in. Everything around me, the scent of the room and the sounds of people talking outside and the way the ink feels on the paper are distilled into the drawing. Everything together creating a unique package."

-diary entry, 2019



Albrechtsburg Castle, Meissen, Germany





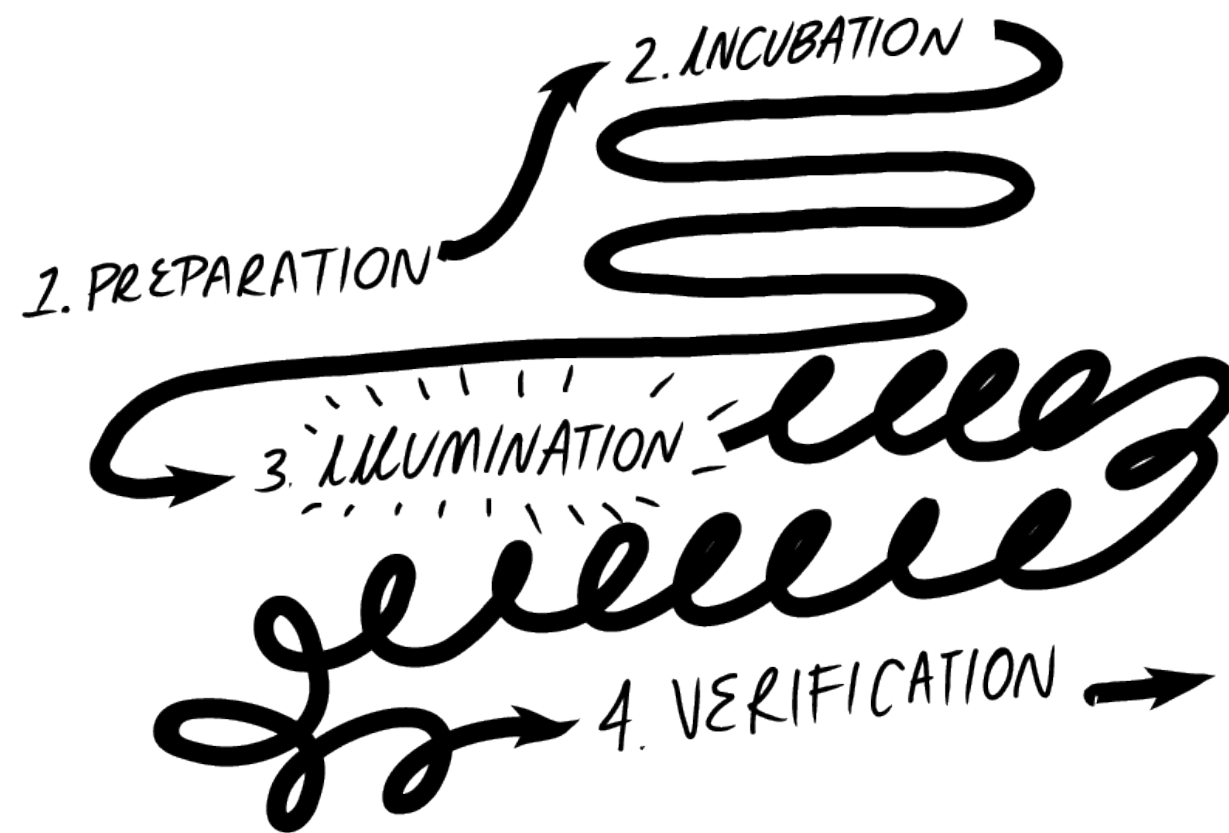
The Filled Page

The blank page is universally terrifying. It is what instigates procrastination and it makes us feel like we don't have anything valuable to say. Motivation and inspiration can help to push past those initial barriers and it is helpful to know how to find them. Sometimes it can be harder to get there, but when we do, the work can finally begin. There were times when it was hard for me to motivate myself.

I felt like there was no way I would be able to make anything interesting or cohesive. Learning more about the nature of procrastination and the impostor syndrome helped me put a name to what I was feeling. I understood how I felt was just a part of the process, which took the pressure off and helped me continue on.

2

The Creative Process



My thesis is that our comfort zones are ever-present in the creative process, for better or for worse. Each creative process is unique and some can even seem bizarre. Some of the greatest minds have worked entirely in their comfort zones, uncompromising about even the smallest details. For example Nikola Tesla only worked in the dark with the blinds drawn (Currey, 2013 A, p. 136-7).

Others make a point to challenge themselves by expanding the boundaries of their comfort zones. Some have strict routines, others are chronically disorganized.

For this project my creative process has followed a traditional pattern of Preparation, Incubation, Illumination and Verification. (Wallas, 1926, ref. Hirsimaa 2018, 14)

During the preparation phase I sketched, gathered inspiration and spent a lot of time deliberating on which way to go. This was when I made a lot of sketches that I would later turn into patterns. However, my methods were ones that I have always relied on that didn't require me to move out of my comfort zone. I worked from home at my desk, with primarily ink and gouache. Realizing this moved me to the next phase of the creative process.

In the incubation phase I took a step back from this project and left it to steep in the

back of my mind. I was able to take my time with this, more so than I would in a normal design course. Since I was more or less my own boss for this project, I determined the pace of my work and allowed myself a more substantial break while I worked on other courses. I did this, in part, because of some mental block that I had, but also because I did not want to rush this project, and wanted to give it my full attention.

Next came the illumination phase. I wouldn't say I dove into this phase, rather I crept in gradually until I was fully submerged. It was at this point that I knew I had to make more sketches, this time outside of my comfort zone. I started by creating a list of possible ways I could get out of my comfort zone while sketching, then let the flow take me from there.

The verification phase was one I was happy to get to. This is typically the point when you either know you are going in the right direction or you know what you're doing isn't working. After the decision to try some ways of sketching outside of my comfort zone I knew I liked the direction I was going in and began my work with a newfound enthusiasm. In this phase, I found all of the inspiration I needed and my sketches became more and more pleasing to me as a collection.

2.1

The Optimal Performance Zone

The optimal performance zone and the danger zone, as described by Alisdair White, are unquestionably linked to the comfort zone in terms of performance. (White, 2008)

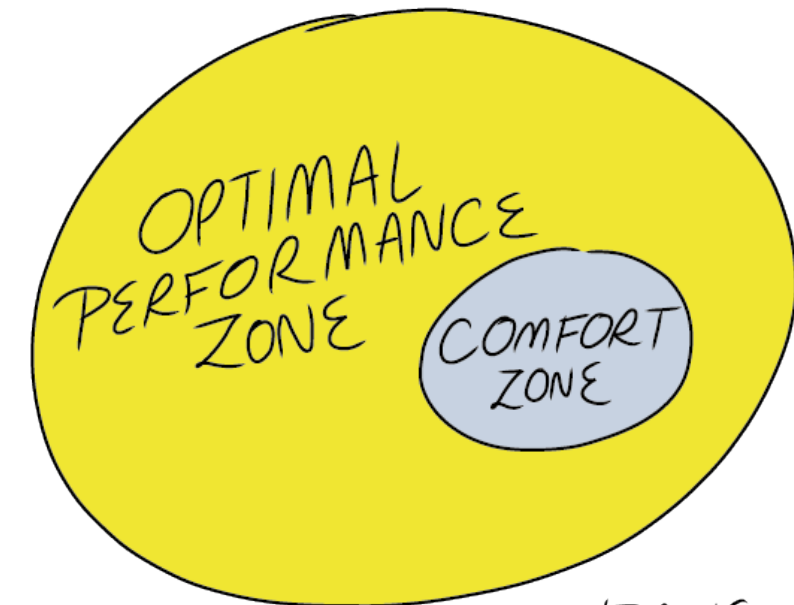
The first illustration shown opposite may share an overarching commonality with the one shown in chapter one. However, this illustration does something that the previous one does not, which is to better illuminate the concept of the comfort zone in a way that does not put one on the defensive. “Where the magic happens” has been translated into two more understandable areas; the optimal performance zone and the danger zone.

The optimal performance zone is where an increase in anxiety or any stimulus forces one out of one’s comfort zone into an increased states of performance. This optimal performance zone is not unlike flow, which I will elaborate on in chapter 2.2.

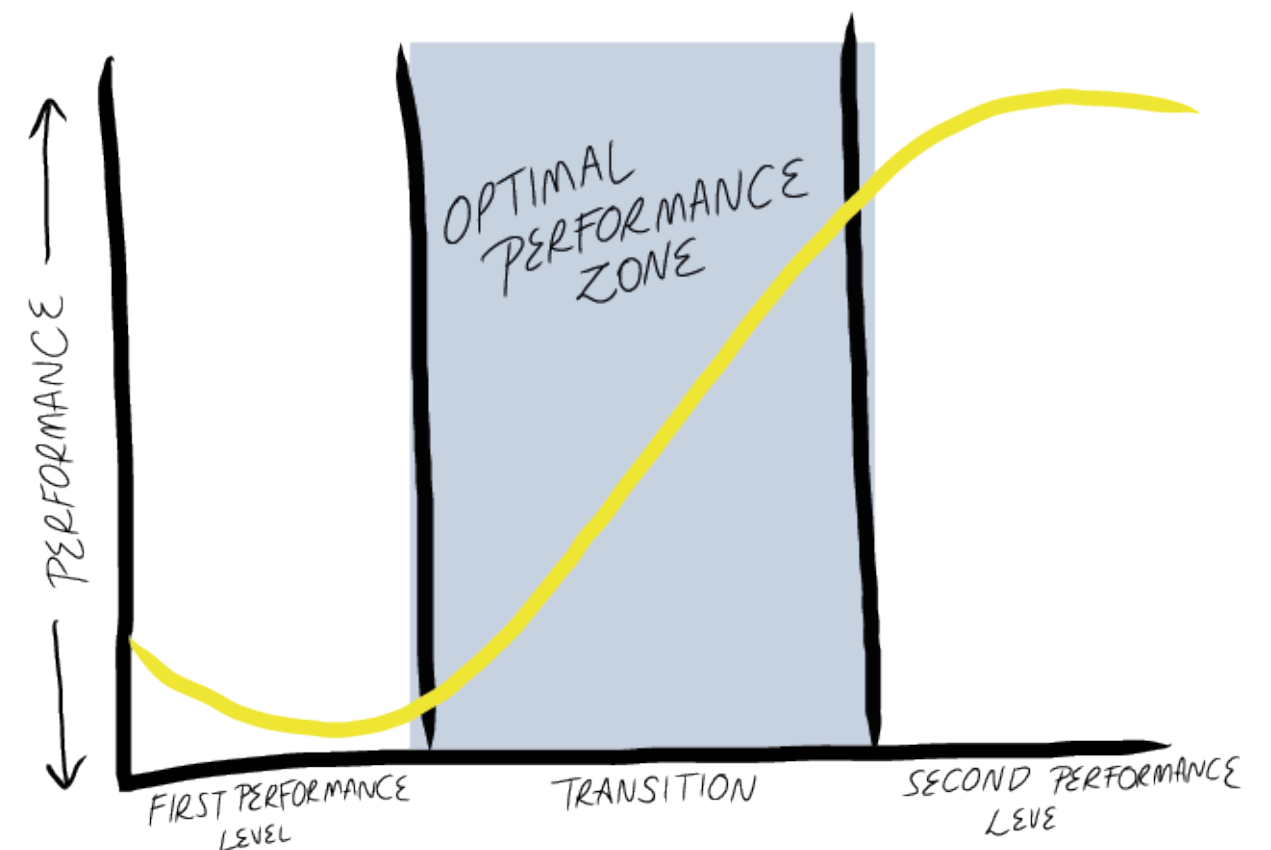
The danger zone is one step further from the comfort zone, where too much is demanded and performance deteriorates after excessive stimulus. Note that in this illustration the optimal performance zone is not an equal distance around the comfort zone to the danger zone. This is to illustrate that in some cases a large increase in anxiety may be required before the border is crossed into the danger zone, while in others it may not take much at all to push someone to their limit.

A similar phenomenon can also be illustrated in the sigmoid curve shown opposite, where after leaving one’s initial comfort zone there is a dip in performance before one enters the optimal performance zone. Then once the situation becomes familiar, one enters into a new, expanded comfort zone and the accelerated performance slows to a steady output.

DANGER ZONE



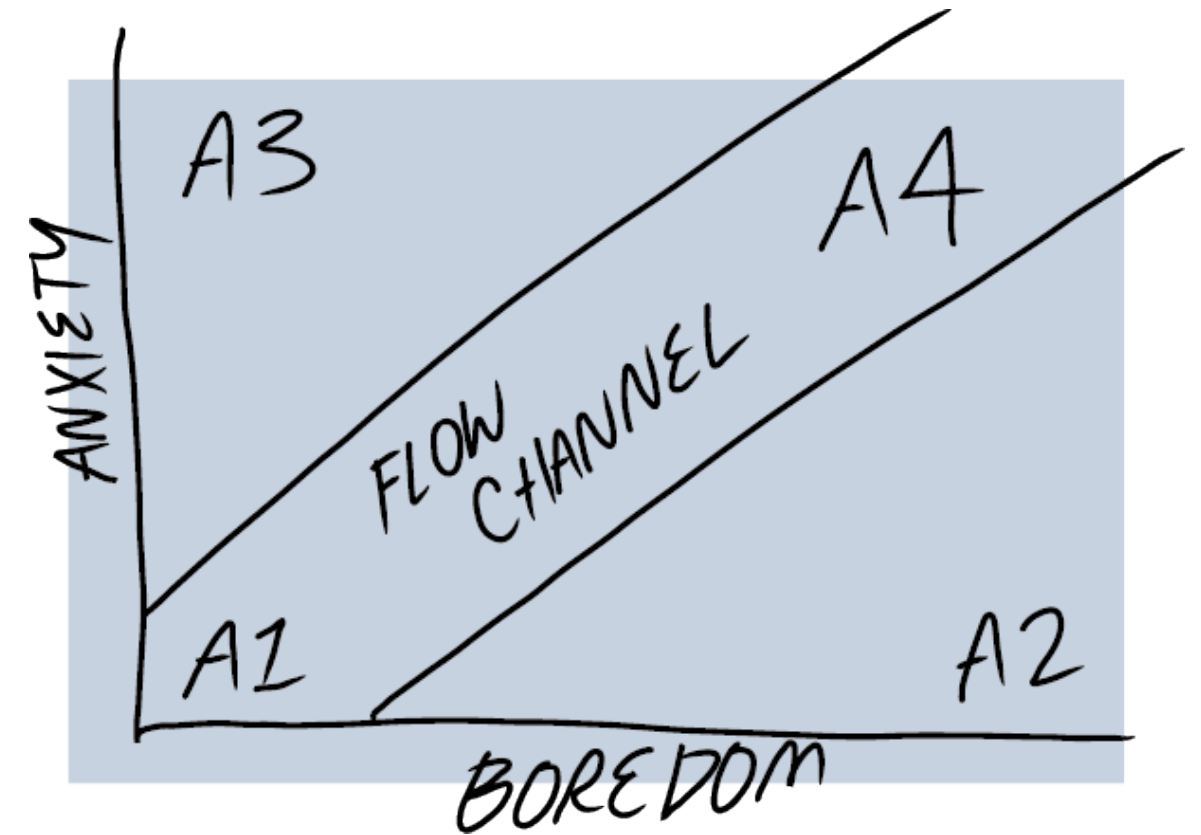
DANGER ZONE



2.2 Flow

“Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person’s capacity to act.”

-Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



Defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow is the experience of joy that comes from doing something challenging and fulfilling. Flow can be experienced in almost any situation, from work, to recreation to even prison.

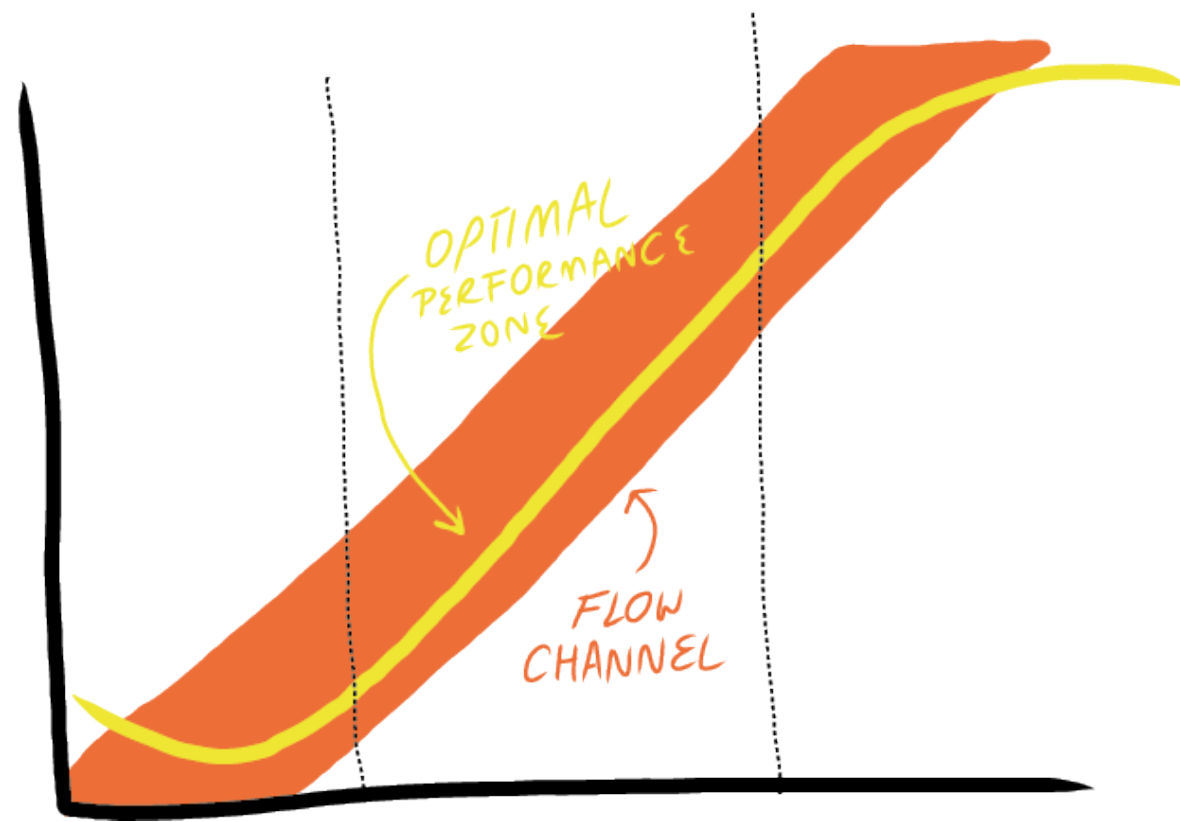
When people describe the experience of flow, they often refer to what Csikszentmihalyi refers to as the eight major phenomenological components of enjoyment:

1. One must have a chance at completing the task.
2. One must be able to concentrate on what one is doing.
3. The task has clear goals.
4. The task provides immediate feedback.
5. One is able to effortlessly act and everyday worries disappear from one’s mind.
6. The experience of a sense of control.
7. One is not preoccupied with oneself during the act, however afterwards one’s sense of self becomes stronger;
8. Time is altered in a way where one experiences hours slipping past or minutes stretching on for ages.

The diagram above illustrates the experience of flow, where one’s skills must be in direct correlation to the challenge at hand, and vice versa. If one’s skills are not enough, one cannot be in flow and experiences anxiety. (A3) If the challenge at hand is not enough, one cannot be in flow and experiences boredom (A2.) The difference between A1 and A4 is that while both are in flow, A4 is a more advanced experience, usually occurring when one has increased their skills and sought

greater challenges to match those skills.

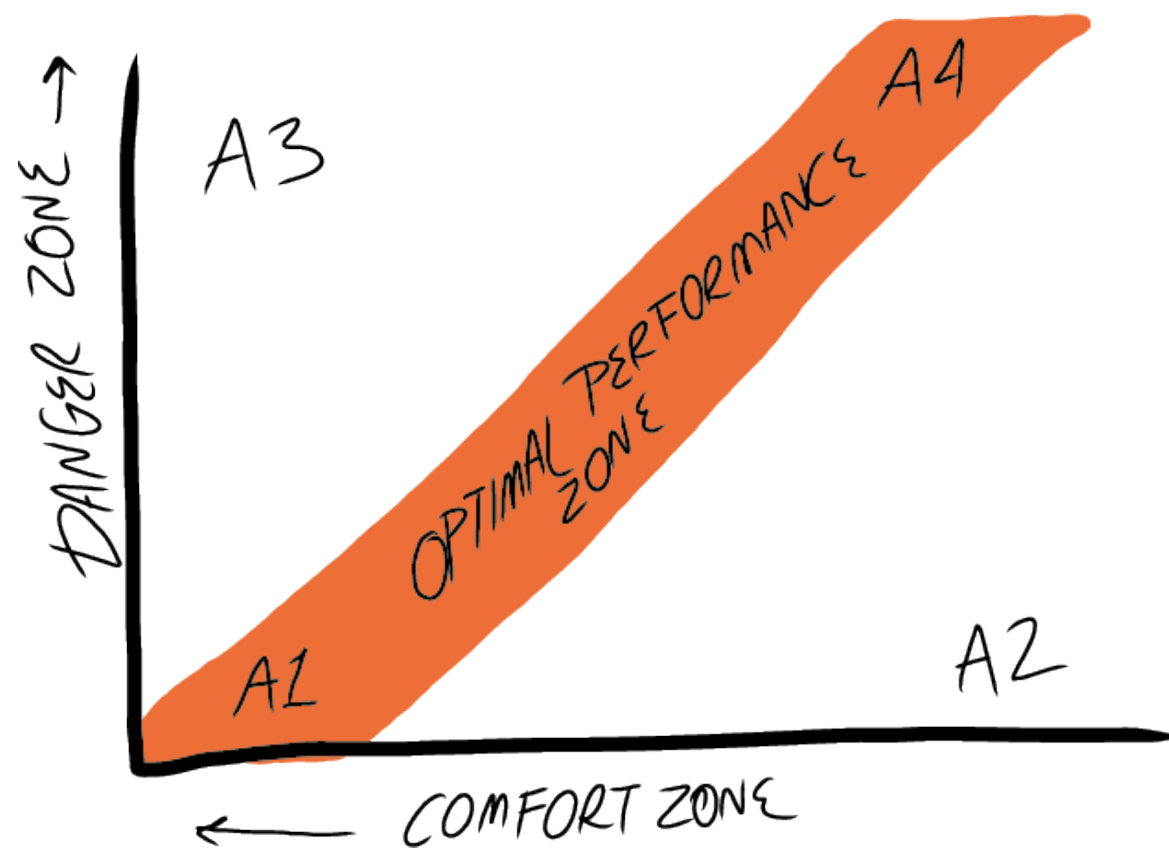
Interestingly enough, Csikszentmihalyi also refers to flow as “optimal experience,” a term not dissimilar to optimal performance. The difference between the two is that optimal experience is intensely personal, while optimal performance is something outsiders are able to recognise and measure. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)



In fact, I have found that if one were to overlay the diagram for flow experience and the optimal performance curve, one would notice strong parallels between the two. If we compare this diagram representing flow to the optimal performance curve, we can see that the flow channel and optimal performance overlay exactly. Furthermore, we can deduce that boredom (A2) represents the comfort zone while anxiety (A3) represents the dip in self-esteem and performance when

the challenges faced exceed the skills at one's disposal.

Another, simpler way of looking at it would be to translate the comfort zone model to the flow diagram, where anxiety is replaced by the danger zone, boredom is again replaced by the comfort zone and the flow channel is replaced by the optimal performance zone.



2.3 Routine

I cannot write about routines without also mentioning the similarity of a daily routine to the comfort zone. Both follow a familiar pattern of behaviour and both benefit from change now and then. In my view, “routine” is simply another term for the comfort zone.

A routine is a set of behaviours that one follows on a day-to-day basis or with any other recurring circumstances. As Mason Currey puts it, our routines and habits are the “circumstances of creative activity.” They do not necessarily define our work, but they can give valuable insight into each other’s creative processes. “In the right hands, it can be a finely calibrated mechanism for taking advantage of a range of limited resources: time (the most limited resource of all) as well as willpower, self-discipline, optimism. A solid routine fosters a well-worn groove for one’s mental energies and helps stave off the tyranny of moods” (Currey, 2013 B, p. II).

Some of us may have more traditional routines. We wake up in the morning, work eight hours and relax in the evenings and on weekends. Others may have more perplexing routines. F. Scott Fitzgerald was known for believing his creative process depended on drinking alcohol. Gertrude Stein never wrote for more than half an hour a day. Karen Dinesen, author of *Out of Africa*, proclaimed in later life that while writing she survived solely on oysters and champagne (Currey, 2019, p.

23). What really gave her the strength she needed was amphetamines, which she took whenever she felt she needed them.

I follow a more chaotic routine, and I tend to work mostly in bursts when the spirit moves me. That being said, I do have certain things I must do before I can get started, routines that “get the juices flowing,” so to speak. The very first thing I do is clean and organize my work station. The mess returns after working for a little while, but this doesn’t bother me, and I tend to think of it as an essential “working mess.” I will almost always have music or a show of some kind playing in the background. This helps me to not overthink what I’m doing, and I can enter into a semi-meditative flow. I do not work in the mornings. I will think about what I will do that day while I drink coffee. Then I will work until I realise I am very hungry and stop for the day to eat dinner.

Other times, when whatever I’m working on is more pressing and I am not sketching with messier materials, I will leave my apartment and work elsewhere, like in a library or a cafe. This helps me get into the mindset for work much faster than if I were to work from home.

My routines do vary from project to project, but once I have found a routine that works for me I will stick to it until I am done with the work.

“There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subject of express volitional deliberation.”

-William James

The creative process is unique to each individual, just like a fingerprint. I found it fascinating to read about the creative processes of others. Something that struck me was that some really amazing works of art and literature are the product of surprisingly unhealthy lifestyles. For example, Proust very rarely left his apartment while writing his seminal work

Remembrance of Things Past (Currey, 2013 A, p 87-90). What that taught me was how unnecessary it is to worry about one's own creative process. When it comes to creative work that is so often very personal to the creator, comparison really is the thief of joy. In the end it doesn't matter how you did what you did, but that you did it at all.



3

The Work

The production phase of this project was divided between working in and out of my comfort zone. The early phases of sketching occurred in early spring, at my desk in my apartment. I worked mostly with ink and gouache on paper. Familiar materials that helped me get started. While I was able to produce some interesting sketches this way, I was too comfortable and didn't have the motivation to attempt any new methods or try working with different materials. I was also distracted by my surroundings, and found it hard to focus for long on my work. I managed to make only a few sketches I was happy with in the weeks working like this.

The first shift happened in the late spring when I designed a print for a silk scarf which was to be displayed at the BOA (Bachelor of Arts) exhibition in May of 2019. I came upon a style which inspired me and really drove the

rest of my production. Before this I was lost in regards to how I wanted this collection to look. I discovered a softer, more romantic style as opposed to the louder, more exuberant style I had used in past projects.

Another change happened in the summer when I went to stay with family in Germany. There in the countryside I was able to ignore distractions from the outside world and focus on sketching. It was also in Germany where I tried to push the boundaries of my comfort zone by sketching with different methods, which I will talk more about in chapter 3.1.

My surroundings there definitely inspired me, and the countryside compared to the city, along with the seasonal changes from early spring to early summer had an effect on the look of my work.



3.1

In Or Out

(of The Comfort Zone)

I had, ironically, avoided working out of my comfort zone entirely while I was in Finland. It was only after I reflected on the quality and quantity of sketches I had that I finally forced myself to attempt other ways of sketching. In the context of this project, it was essential that I do this, and I was unsurprisingly much more inspired and efficient after injecting my work with new methods and materials. Not to mention this decision led to some of my favorite patterns.

I began by making lists of what ways of sketching were out of my comfort zone. They included: working entirely on the computer, photography, sketching using foreign objects like leaves or rocks or household items, fast-paced sketching, sketching in public and non-abstract or representative sketching. I initially planned to attempt each of these and methodically track the differences in quality. I thought I could create some kind of

graph, charting the validity of each method. What actually ended up happening was that I discovered a couple of new ways of working that I really enjoyed and went with them for the rest of my production. Working this way allowed me to sketch intuitively without editing myself too early, something I'm sure would have happened had I forced myself to work methodically.

I still enjoyed working with ink and gouache on paper, but instead of spending an hour on each sketch like I had at home in Helsinki, I restricted the time I had for each sketch to a maximum of two minutes. This way, when I discovered an element or technique that I liked I couldn't lock onto it in the first sketch. I had to start a new one immediately where I would repeat whatever it was I liked, and did this over and over. This "evolved" the pattern quickly over multiple sketches. Not only did I have more material, I also had a sharper

image of what it was I was producing.

Another method I ended up enjoying was using photography for sketching. I didn't have a clear plan or understanding of what it meant to sketch by taking photographs, but nonetheless I went out and photographed things that inspired me. Almost all of the photos I took were of nature, and I especially gravitated towards subjects that I thought had interesting textures.

I sketched with the photos by working with them on my computer. I liked making collages out of the photographs and making "hidden" images. At this point I was only focused on the sketches themselves and didn't want to worry about how I would turn them into patterns.

The last new technique I will be mentioning is sketching on the computer. While using a

computer is not new to patternmaking, I had only ever used a computer after I had made my sketch in "real life." That is, I would edit my sketch into a pattern like I did with my photographs or my gouache and ink sketches. This time I would draw directly on the computer using a drawing tablet.

I found that this method gave me a similar feeling of freedom as the fast-paced sketching I did using gouache. I made layer after layer of sketches on Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, and I enjoyed the control I had without undoing or erasing much of what I had done.

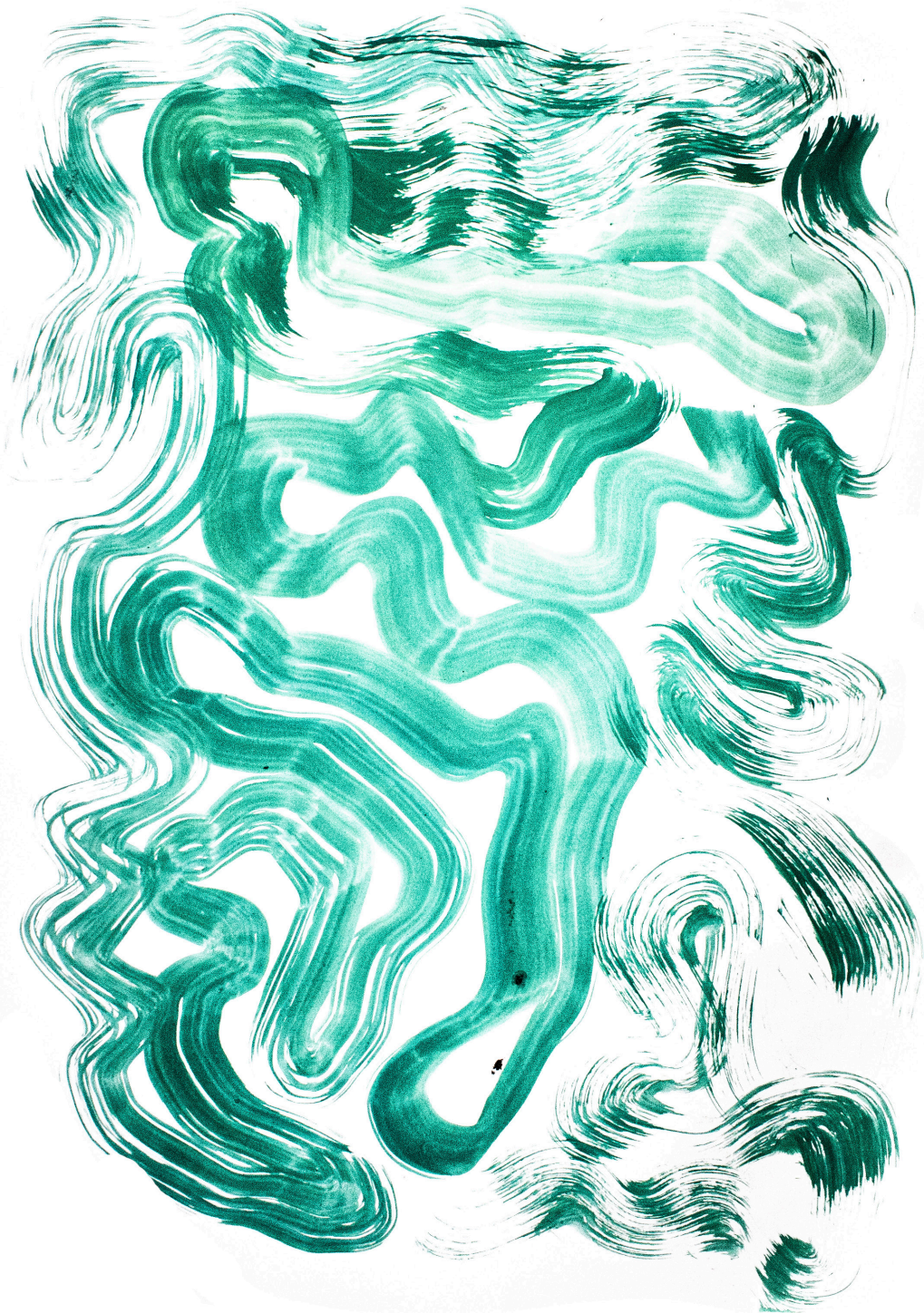
Working on the computer led me to creating a lot of symmetrical designs. I was able to perfectly reflect abstract sketches and create interesting ink-blot style compositions. These reminded me of baroque and rococo wallpapers, something I embraced and let inspire the rest of my work.

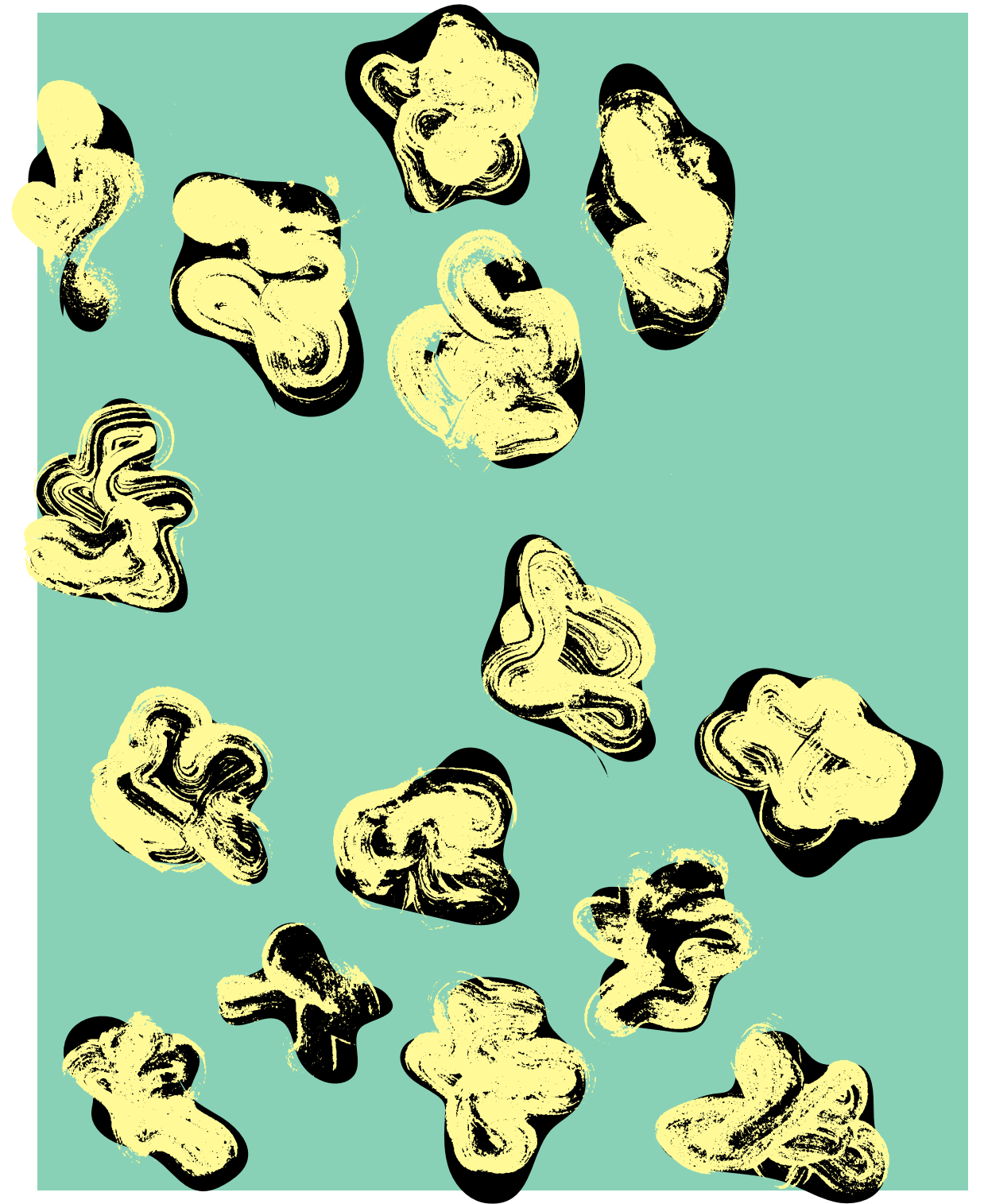


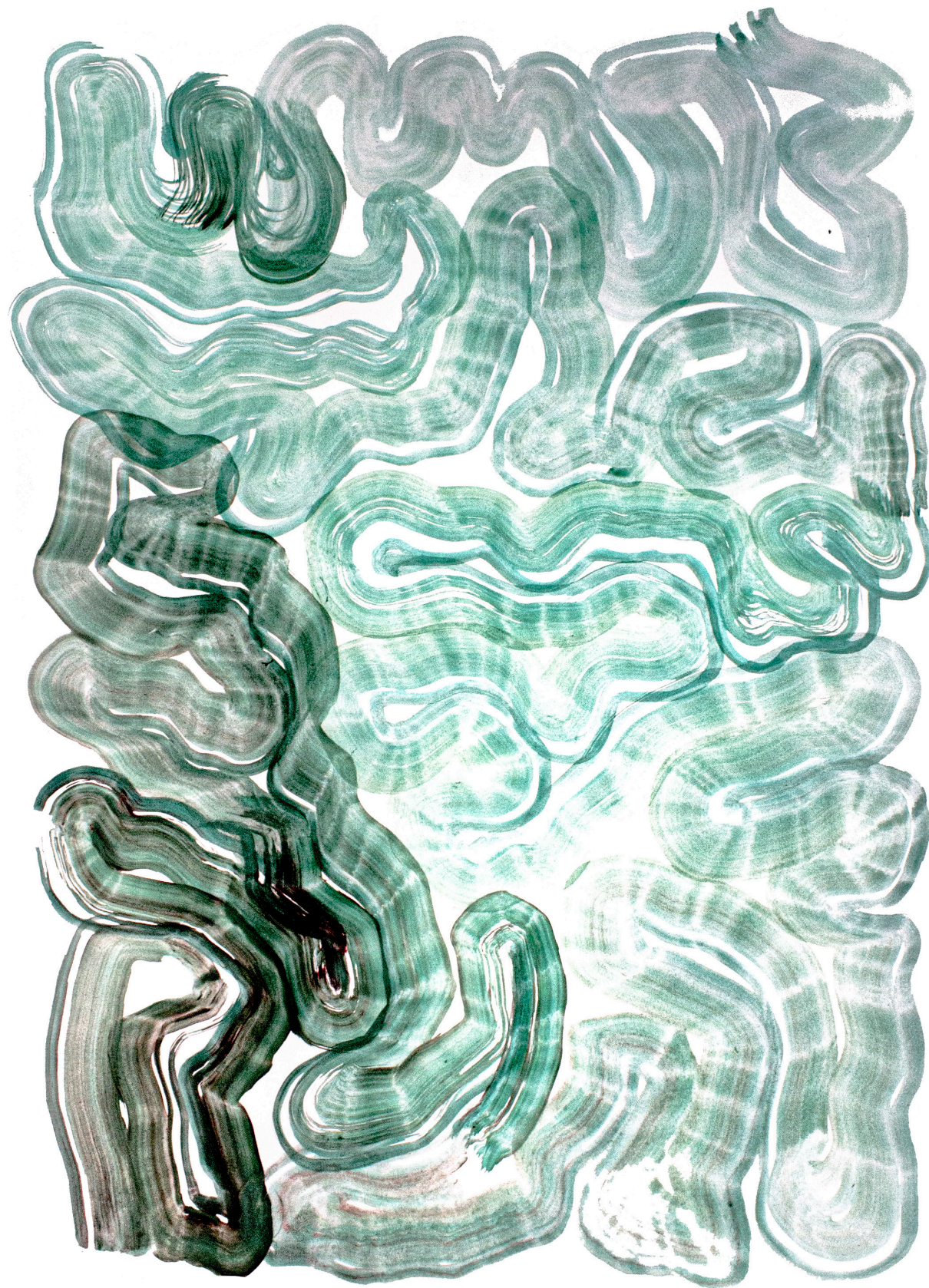






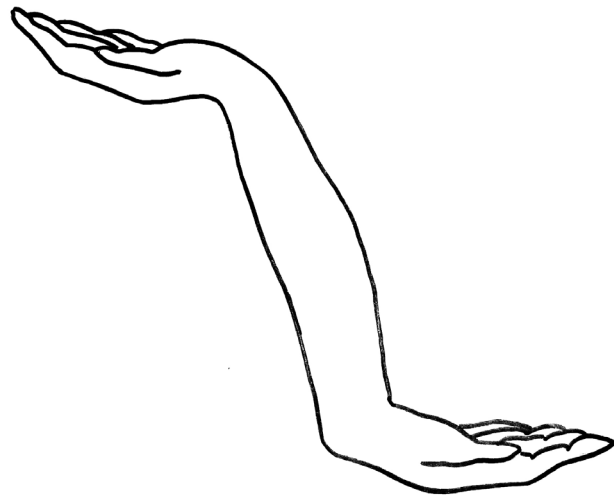






3.2

Subjects and Themes



The subjects present in my sketches came as something of a surprise to me, and I am not able to pinpoint where they came from. At some point I became fascinated with the human body and the slightly asymmetrical composition of people's faces, and ended up making these things the subject of many of my favorite sketches and patterns.

One specific source of inspiration I am able to mention is traditional chinoiserie wallpapers. I have always admired chinoiserie wallpapers for their whimsy and intricate details, but in the context of this project I became especially, actively inspired by them once I had done most of my body-centric sketches. I knew I wanted the same element of surprise in my patterns and set out to make ones that

had the same effect. That is not to say that designed any chinoiserie-style patterns, it is simply that I wanted the surprise of the faces or limbs in the pattern to give me a similar feeling.

I had a similar idea for my other, more abstract patterns in taking inspiration from symmetrical baroque wallpapers as I had mentioned in chapter 3.1.

In the end I was happy to see my patterns come together as a collection, the result of my subconscious working even when I felt like everything was disjointed and nothing was right. This happened in bits and pieces, one realization leading to the next until a cohesive visual world was created.

3.3

Editing Into Patterns



I didn't have a hard time choosing my favorite sketches to turn into patterns. Some sketches I ended up enjoying as sketches only and didn't like them as patterns. Other sketches that I thought were not as interesting ended up turning into my favorite patterns. Some that I liked both as sketches and patterns just didn't work in the collection. I made all of my sketches into patterns on the computer using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator.

For the ones done in real life, I either scanned them or took photographs, then edited the raw picture into something that could be vectorized and further edited.

When I turned my photo-sketches into patterns, I would "cut out" pieces of the photo and rasterize those pieces into a halftone pattern. Then I would arrange the cutouts into a pattern. This would make the photos unrecognizable as photos, their image turned into a two-tone that made an interesting texture in the final pattern.

In choosing the colors, I knew more or less what I wanted. The main color palette came from the silk scarf I had designed earlier in the spring; mostly greens and blues and yellows. I did add more colors to enrich the collection like a vibrant fuchsia and some

browns and blacks. Looking back I can see all of these colors come from my summery surroundings.

My final tweaks came after I had shown the patterns to family and friends and asked for feedback. After staring at these patterns for weeks I needed fresh eyes to show me what I couldn't see myself; an out of place color or a bad repeat.

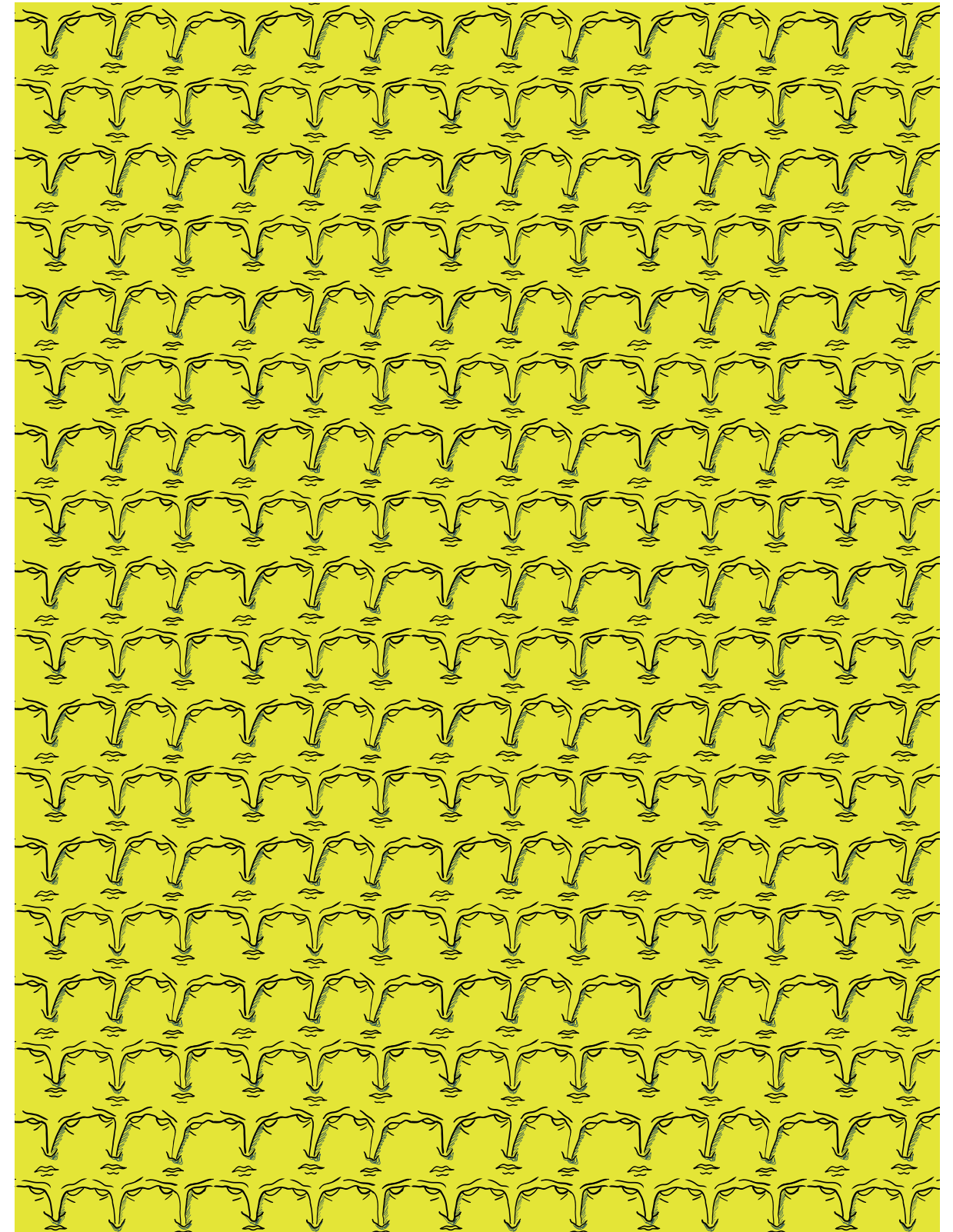
Next, I had to decide on which patterns should be in the final collection. This was difficult as I had to evaluate the collection again each time I chose to remove or include a pattern. In the end I settled on eight final pattern and two placement prints.

The final hurdle was naming the patterns. I knew that the name of the collection was *The Comfort Zone*, but I hadn't given any of the patterns real names until the very end. Up until then they all had working titles like *Faces*, *Baroque* and *Limbs* that didn't have much to do with the The Comfort Zone.

The following are the final eight patterns and two placement prints, captioned with their names and sizes.

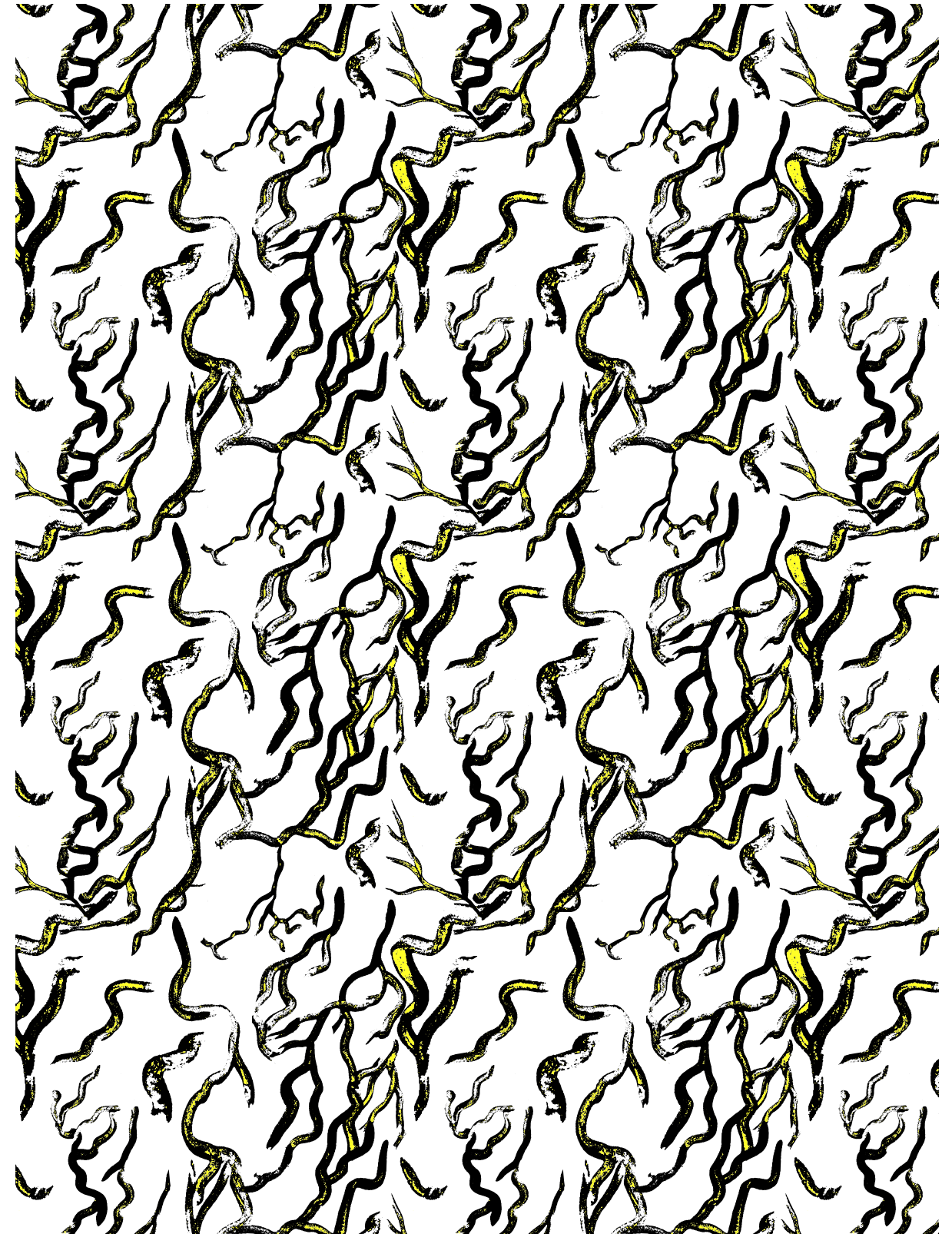
Judgement

32x22 cm



150x200 cm

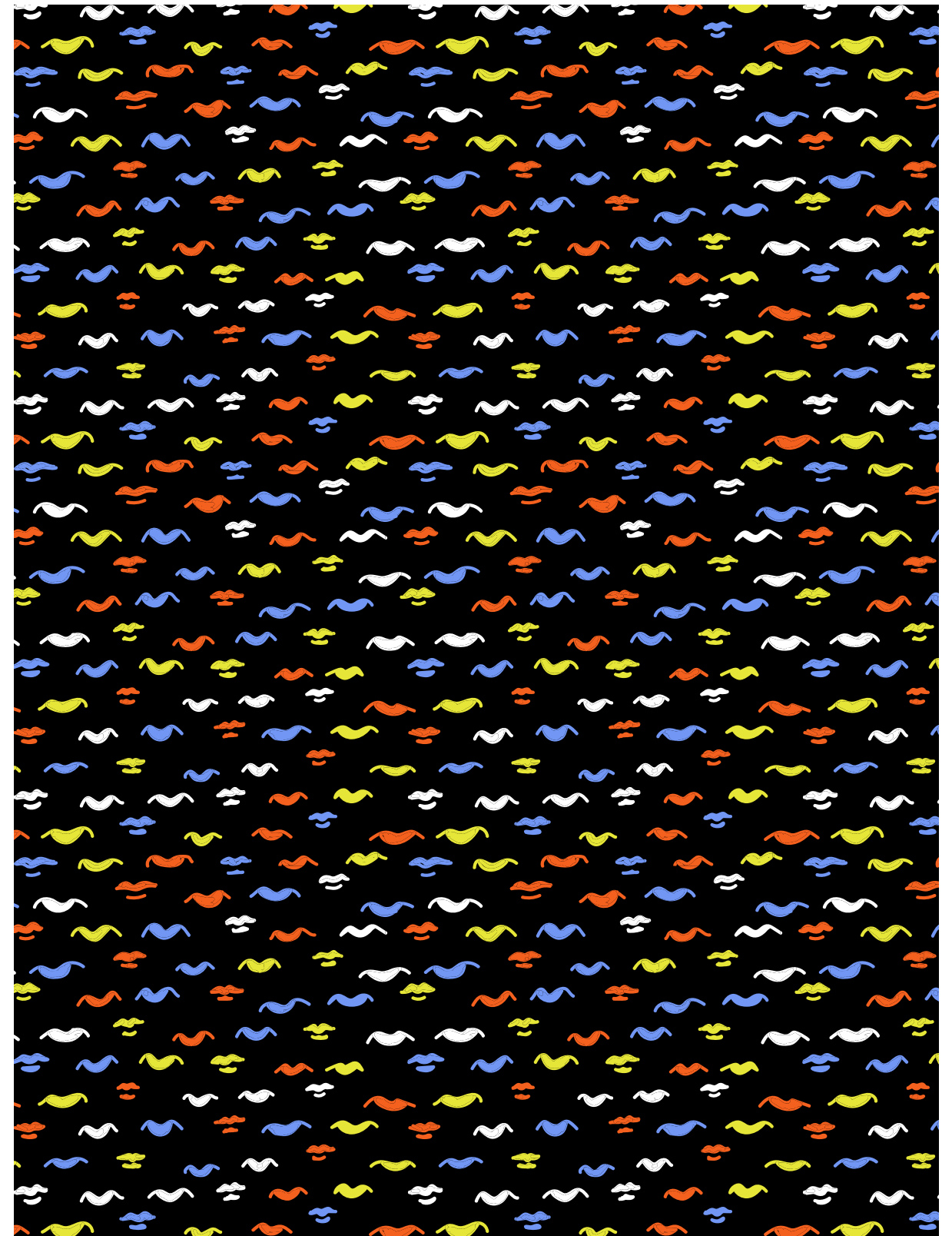
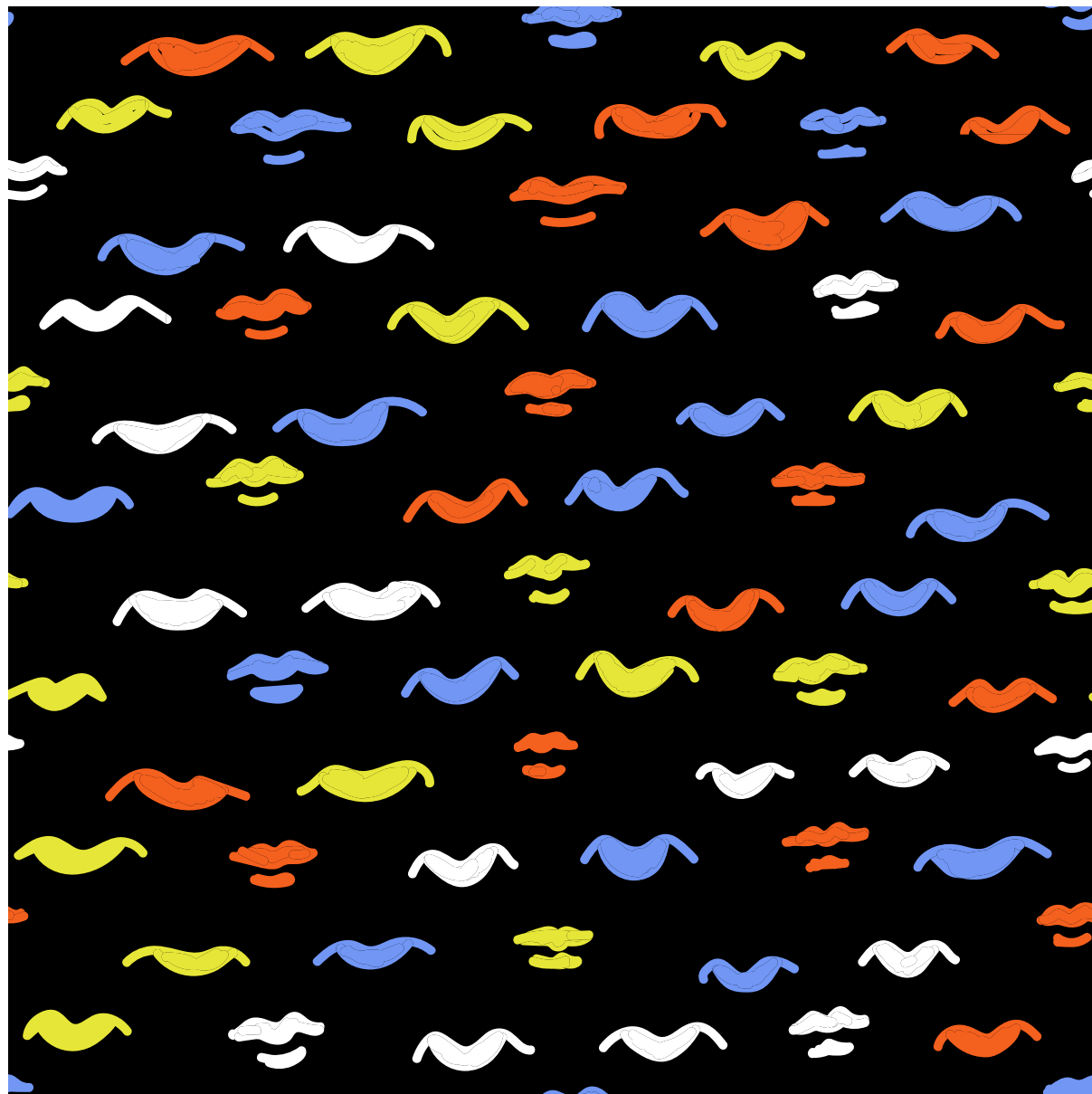
Thicket
64x64 cm



150x200 cm

Individuals

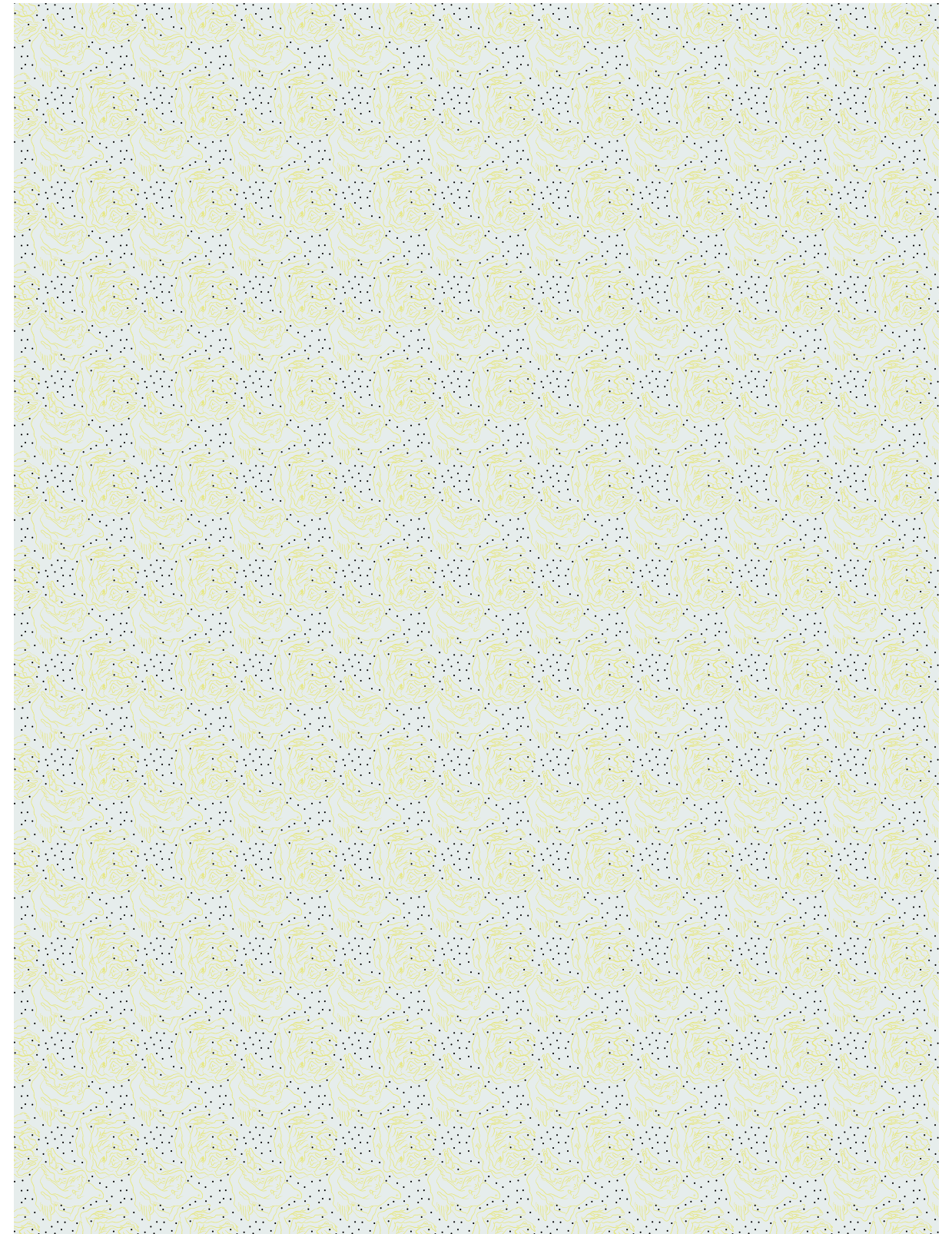
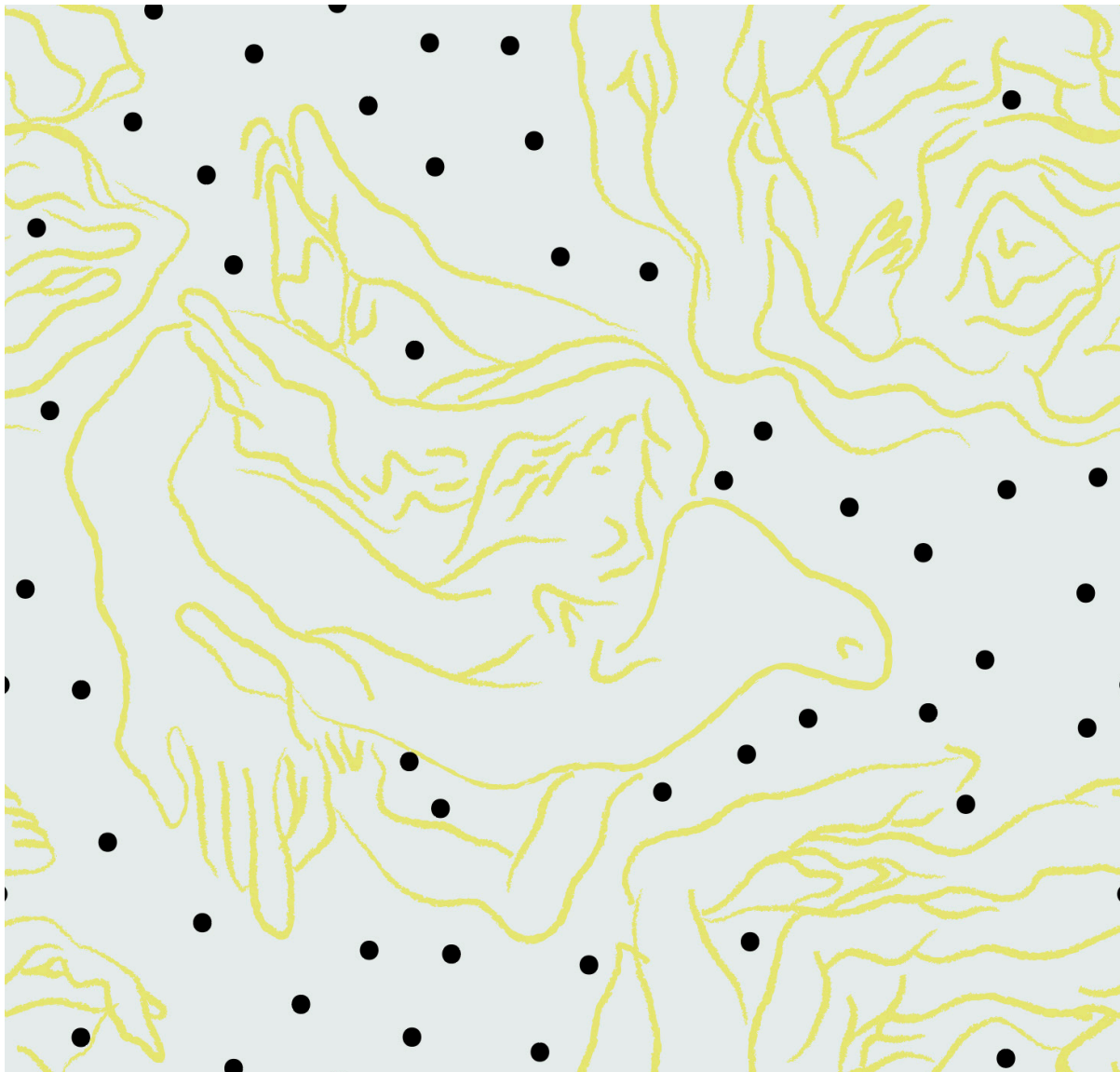
64x64 cm



150x200 cm

Habits

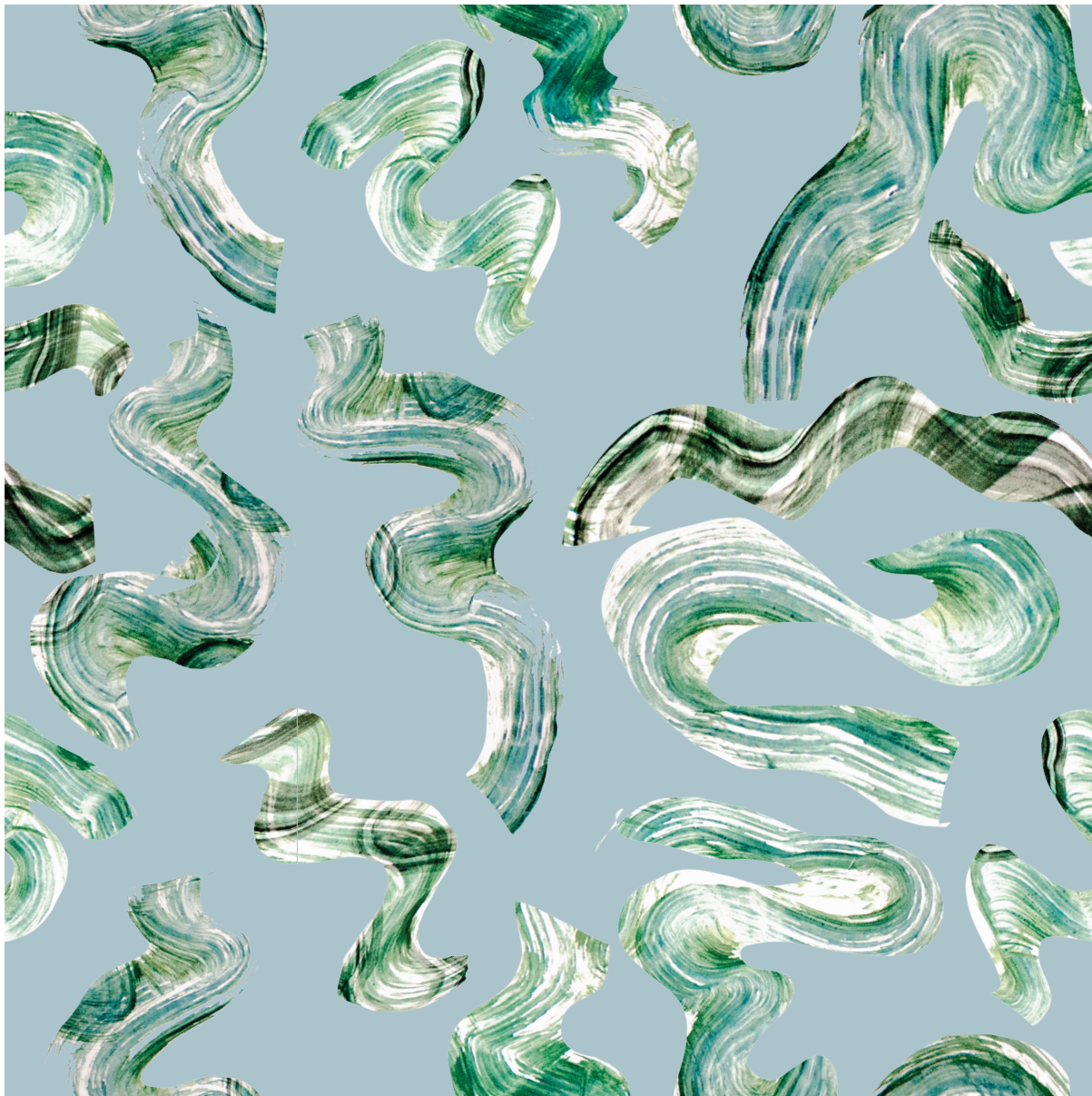
16 x 15 cm



150x200 cm

Tart

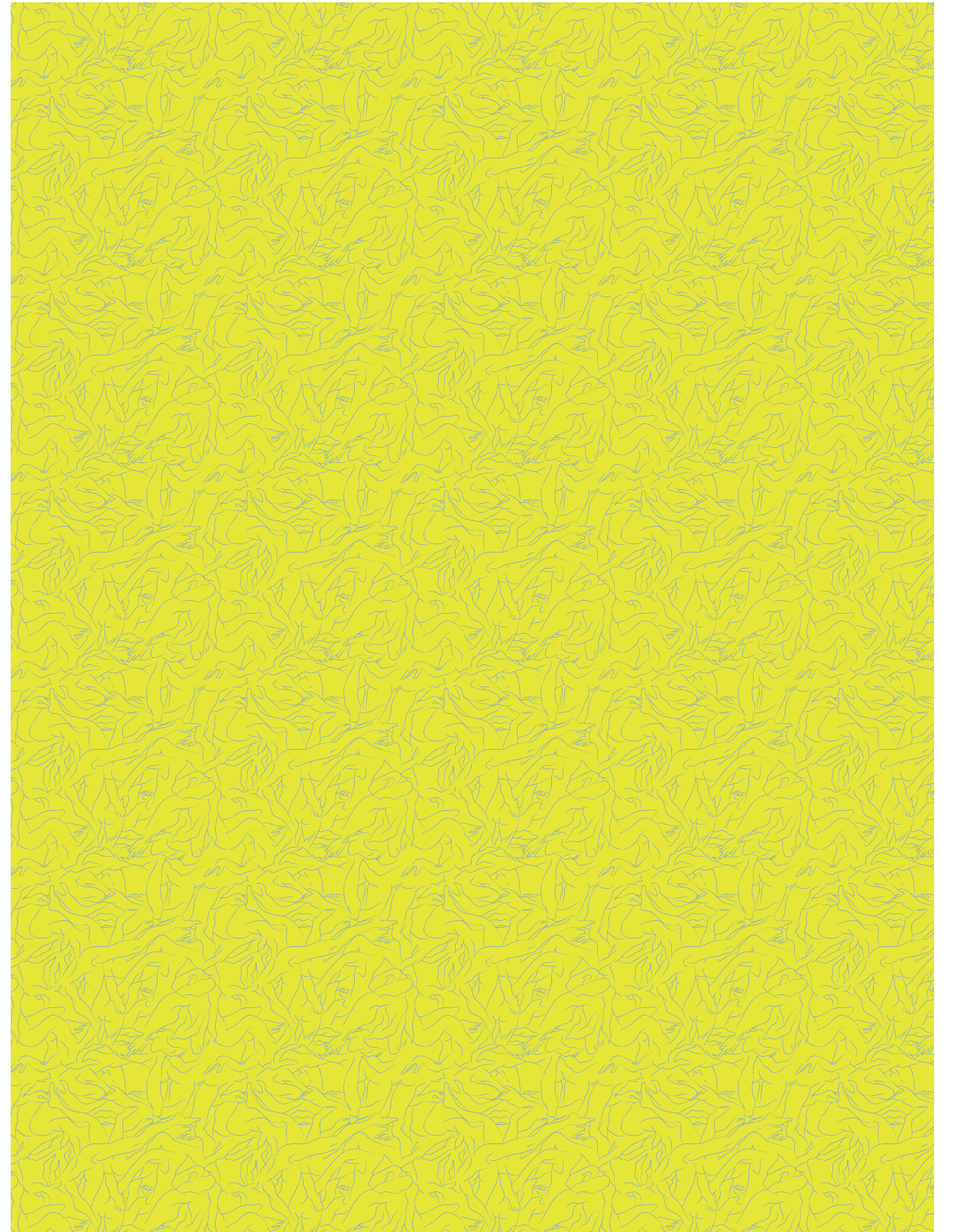
42 x 42 cm



150x200 cm

Relationship

32x32 cm



150x200 cm

Pungent

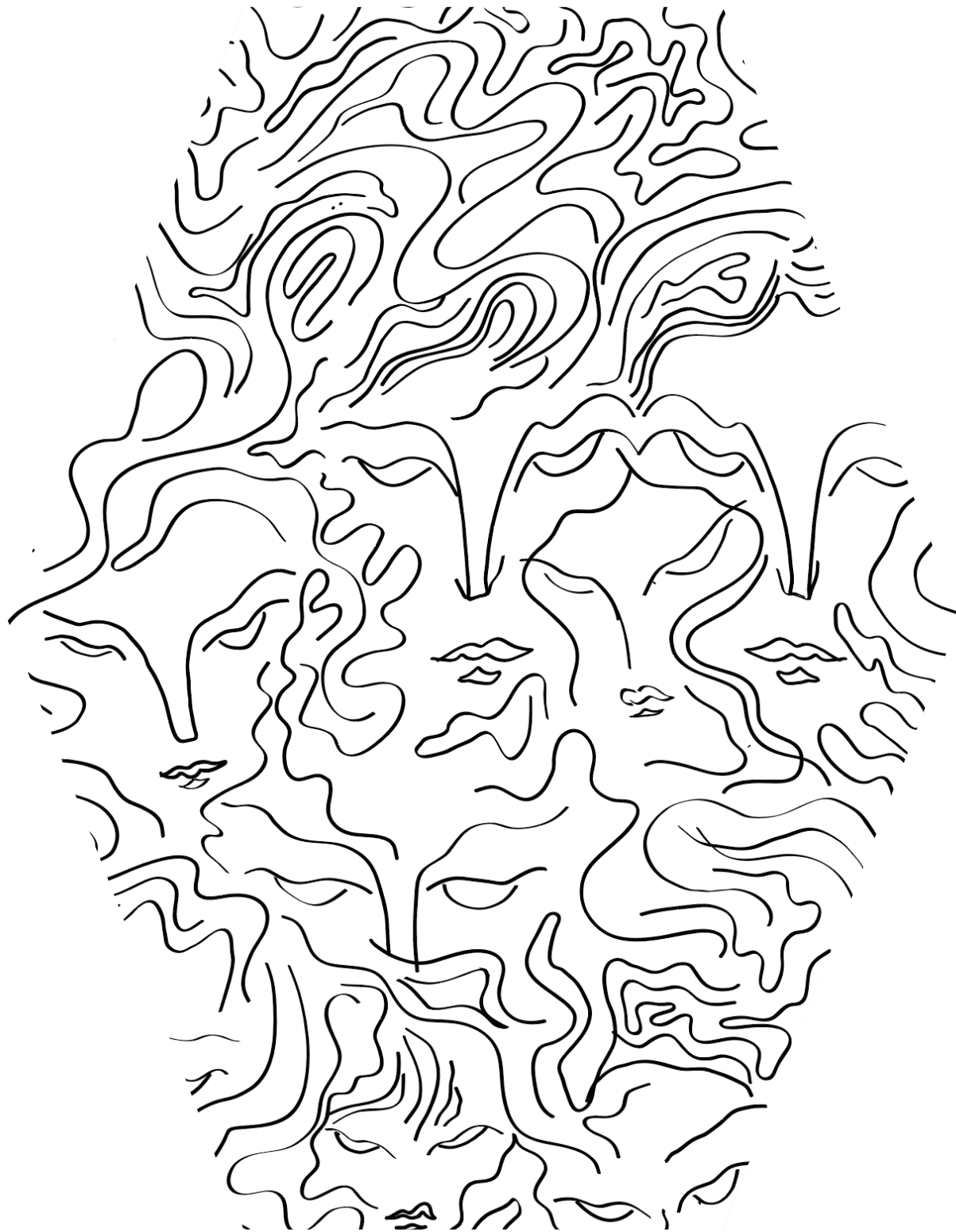
64x64 cm



150x200 cm

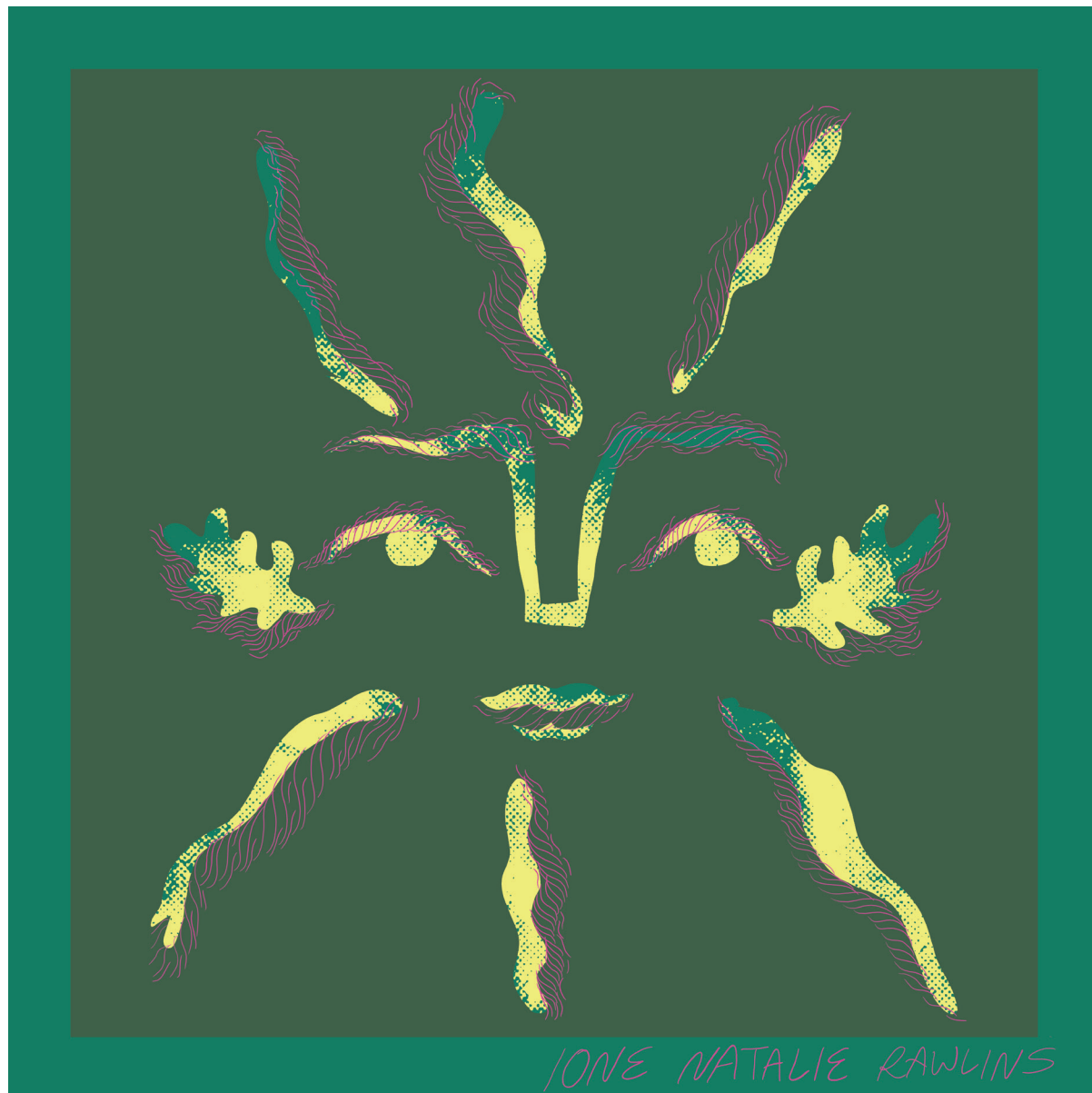
Discord

50 x 64 cm



Identity

64x64 cm



Comfort Zone

180 x 180 cm





4

Reflection

The process of writing and producing this thesis was really enjoyable for me. Not only was it interesting to learn about the comfort zone and its role in the creative process, it was also rewarding to experience what I was reading about first hand, including the impostor syndrome, motivation and flow. I have expanded my comfort zone when it comes to design and as a result have gained confidence in my creative process.

Gaining new insight into the nature of inspiration led me to understand that I benefit from taking my time at the beginning of the creative process. Doing this helps me to gather my motivation and inspiration in a way that energizes the rest of the production.

I have also realized that I should make changes from my day-to-day routine when I begin a new project. During the production phase of this project I had the chance to change both my surroundings and my techniques. I now know I work well when I am able to find a fresh routine for a project that I can stick to until the end. I get inspired from the change but also stay motivated because of the routine.

My goal in studying the comfort zone was to understand the positive and negative effects the comfort zone has on creative processes. As of writing this reflection I do understand a lot more than I did in the beginning of this project, but I also know that there is still more to learn. I'm sure that there is much more to do in terms of experimentation and learning about the psychology of "creative comfort zones."

I am very happy with the patterns I designed, my only regret now is not having used them for any physical product. This is something I am considering for future projects.

I wouldn't change much about my process, as every step of it gave me valuable insights that related to the topic, such as procrastination and ultimately flow. My production reflects this. It started slow and without direction, often stalled by procrastination, then by feelings caused by impostor syndrome. Changing my environment did help, and while I cannot go to another country every time I need to focus on work, I know that I can travel around my own city and look for places and things I have not yet seen.

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Photos

Page 23.

Doughty, Henry Montagu. (1893). *Our Wherry in Wendish Lands; from Friesland, through the Mecklenburg Lakes, to Bohemia*. 2nd ed. Jarrold & Sons, p.393.

All other photos by Ione Rawlins

Thank you:

To my advisor Petra Haikonen

And to my family for their support and love.